BILLY J. WILLIAMS, OSB #901366

United States Attorney District of Oregon

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Attorneys for the United States of America

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

DISTRICT OF OREGON

PORTLAND DIVISION

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

3:19-cv-00662-MA

Plaintiff,

v.

COMPLAINT, in rem, FOR **FORFEITURE**

\$28,240.00 in U.S. CURRENCY, in rem,

Defendant.

Plaintiff, United States of America, by Billy J. Williams, United States Attorney for the District of Oregon, and Alexis A. Lien, Assistant United States Attorney, for its Complaint in rem for forfeiture, alleges:

I.

This Court has subject matter jurisdiction, in rem jurisdiction, and venue pursuant to 21 U.S.C. § 881; 28 U.S.C. §§ 1345, 1355, 1356, and 1395; and 19 U.S.C. § 1610.

II.

Defendant, in rem, \$28,240.00 in U.S. currency, was seized in the District of Oregon, and

is now and during the pendency of this action will be within the jurisdiction of this Court.

III.

Defendant, in rem, \$28,240.00 in U.S. currency, represents proceeds traceable to an

exchange for controlled substances or was used or intended to be used to facilitate such a

transaction in violation of 21 U.S.C. § 801, et. seq., and is forfeitable to the United States pursuant

to the provisions of 21 U.S.C. § 881(a)(6), as more particularly set forth in the Declaration of

Postal Inspector David Hardin, United States Postal Inspection Service, marked as Exhibit A,

attached and fully incorporated herein by this reference.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff, United States of America, prays that due process issue to enforce

the forfeiture of Defendant, in rem, \$28,240.00 in U.S. currency, that due notice be given to all

interested persons to appear and show cause why forfeiture of this Defendant, in rem, should not

be decreed; that due proceedings be had thereon; that this Defendant be forfeited to the United

States; that the Plaintiff United States of America be awarded its costs and disbursements incurred

in this action.

Dated: **April 30, 2019**.

Respectfully submitted,

BILLY J. WILLIAMS

United States Attorney

s/ Alexis A. Lien

ALEXIS A. LIEN

VERIFICATION

I, DAVID HARDIN, declare, under penalty of perjury, pursuant to the provisions of 28 U.S.C. Section 1746, that I am a Postal Inspector with the United States Postal Inspection Service, and that the foregoing Complaint *in rem* for Forfeiture is made on the basis of information officially furnished and upon the basis of such information the Complaint *in rem* for Forfeiture is true as I verily believe.

s/ David HardinDAVID HARDINPostal InspectorUnited States Postal Inspection Service

DECLARATION of DAVID HARDIN

I, DAVID HARDIN, do hereby declare:

PURPOSE OF THIS DECLARATION

1. This declaration is submitted in support of a complaint, *in rem*, for forfeiture of \$28,240.00 U.S. currency. The information contained in this declaration is based on an investigation conducted by United States Postal Inspector David Hardin and will show that \$28,240.00 in U.S. currency from U.S. Priority Mail Express parcels EE268067624US and EM027609271US is subject to forfeiture pursuant to 21 U.S.C § 881(a)(6), as moneys furnished or intended to be furnished by any person in exchange for a controlled substance, proceeds traceable to such an exchange, or moneys used or intended to be used to facilitate violations of 21 U.S.C. § 801, *et seq*. Information contained in this declaration is based upon my personal observations, training, and experience, and that of other law enforcement officers. This declaration does not contain each and every fact that I know about this investigation, only those necessary to establish probable cause to believe the seized currency is subject to forfeiture pursuant to 21 U.S.C. § 881(a)(6).

AGENT BACKGROUND AND TRAINING

2. I am a Postal Inspector with the United States Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) and have been since 2018. I am currently assigned to the Portland, Oregon Domicile Office of the USPIS. As a U.S. Postal Inspector, I am authorized to investigate crimes involving offenses relating to the United States Postal Service (USPS). As part of my duties, I investigate incidents where the United States mail system is used for the purpose of transporting non-mailable matter, including controlled substances such as marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamine, and heroin, as well as proceeds of the sale of controlled substances. During the course of my USPIS employment, I

Declaration of David Hardin

EXHIBIT A PAGE 1

applied for, received, and executed more than 10 federal search warrants in the investigation of offenses relating to the USPS.

- 3. I am an investigative or law enforcement officer of the United States within the meaning of 18 U.S.C. § 2510(7), in that I am empowered by law to conduct investigations and to make arrests for federal offenses. My training and experience includes a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science. From July 2009 to February 2018, I served as a U.S. Secret Service Special Agent. Prior to my U.S. Secret Service career, I served five years in the Navy, achieving the rank of Lieutenant.
- 4. In December 2008, I attended the Criminal Investigator Training Program at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (F.L.E.T.C.) in Glynco, Georgia. This training covered the investigation of violations of federal laws, the process of criminal investigations, and the judicial process. Following the training at F.L.E.T.C., I attended the Secret Service training academy in Beltsville, Maryland. This training focused specifically on investigating violations of the federal laws that the Secret Service investigates, including bank fraud, wire fraud, counterfeiting, and cyber-crimes.
- 5. During the course of my employment with the Inspection Service and the Secret Service, I conducted or participated in criminal investigations involving burglary, robbery, assault, mail theft, identity theft, credit card fraud, bank fraud, threatening communications, threats against protectees of the U.S. Secret Service, the manufacture of counterfeit currency, mail fraud, the unlawful mailing of dangerous controlled substances, the fraudulent use of stolen or forged Postal Money Orders, the fraudulent use of stolen credit card information to purchase merchandise, and the shipping of that merchandise through the U.S. Mail. In October 2018, I completed a USPIS training course on Prohibited Mailings involving narcotics.

BACKGROUND ON CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES SENT THROUGH THE U.S. MAIL

- 6. I know from my training and experience that drug traffickers frequently use U.S. Postal Service Priority Mail Express and Priority Mail services to ship controlled substances, including marijuana, cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine. I know from my training and experience that illegal drug recipients often use U.S. Postal Service Priority Mail Express and Priority Mail services to ship the proceeds of the illegal sale of controlled substances, or moneys used or intended to be used to facilitate the illegal sale of controlled substances, in cash, or other controlled substances, to suppliers of controlled substances. I know from training and discussions with other law enforcement officers that these controlled substances, proceeds of the illegal sale of controlled substances, and funds related to the facilitation of the illegal sale of controlled substances are often found during parcel investigations and interdictions.
- 7. Based on my experience, training, and discussions with other law enforcement officers experienced in drug investigations, I know Oregon is a marijuana source state for the mailing of controlled substances to destination locations across the United States. Current Oregon state laws permitting the recreational and medical growth, purchase, and possession of marijuana provide individuals with significant quantities of marijuana, which can be illegally mailed to other states where marijuana is illegal or less available. Accordingly, marijuana sales are substantially more profitable outside the state of Oregon than they are inside the state of Oregon.
- 8. Based on my experience, training, and discussions with other law enforcement officers experienced in drug investigations, I know that certain indicators often exist when drug traffickers use the U.S. mails to ship controlled substances, proceeds of the sale of controlled substances, or funds to facilitate the sale of controlled substances from one location to another.

- 9. Drug traffickers use U.S. Postal Service Priority Mail Express and Priority Mail services because of the reliability of delivery, speed of delivery, low cost, the customer's ability to track the package's shipment online, as well as the low risk of detection by law enforcement. Shippers using U.S. Postal Service Priority Mail Express and Priority Mail services pay for the benefit of being able to confirm the delivery of the parcel by checking the U.S. Postal Service website or calling a toll-free number. I know from my training and experience the corresponding weights and prices of U.S. Postal Service Priority Mail Express and Priority Mail outbound marijuana parcels from Oregon to non-source states typically range from ten (10) to thirty (30) pounds and cost from \$40 to \$100.
- Express is used primarily for business-related mailings. Unlike typical U.S. Postal Service Priority Mail Express business mailings, which usually have typed labels, packages containing controlled substances, proceeds, and/or facilitation funds often have handwritten address information. The handwritten label on U.S. Postal Service Priority Mail Express packages containing controlled substances and/or proceeds usually does not contain a business account number and/or credit card number. This is an indication that the sender likely paid cash. A credit card or business account number would more likely enable law enforcement officers to connect the package to identifiable individuals. I further know that drug traffickers who use U.S. Postal Service Priority Mail Express services often either waive or do not request a recipient signature upon delivery of the mail parcel. This can allow the parcel to be delivered without the addressee or the addressee's agent having to sign for the parcel, contingent upon the parcel being left in a secure location at the address.
- 11. I know from my training and experience that drug traffickers who mail controlled substances, and the drug purchasers who send payment in the form of cash or other drugs, often

use false or incomplete information in labeling the parcels. In this way, drug traffickers can distance themselves from the package containing controlled substances, the proceeds of the sale of the controlled substances, or facilitation funds in the event the package is intercepted by law enforcement.

12. I know from my training and experience that drug traffickers who mail controlled substances, proceeds of the illegal sale of controlled substances, and facilitation funds are often aware that parcels are inspected by trained canines. Accordingly, drug traffickers often attempt to wrap their parcels, and the contents of their parcels, in a manner they believe will disguise the odor and contents of the items in the parcels. In order to conceal the distinctive smell of controlled substances from certified controlled substance detection canines, these packages are sometimes sealed with the use of tape around the seams. Also, the parcels often contain other parcels which are carefully sealed to prevent the escape of odors. Sometimes perfumes, coffee, dryer sheets, tobacco, or other strong-smelling substances are used to mask the odor of the controlled substances, proceeds of the illegal sale of controlled substances, and/or facilitation funds being shipped.

SUMMARY OF INVESTIGATION OF U.S. PRIORITY MAIL EXPRESS PARCELS EE268067624US and EM027609271US

On November 15, 2018, I went to the Portland Processing and Distribution Center/Facility (PDC/PDF), located at 7007 Cornfoot Rd., Portland, OR 97218 as part of my regular investigatory duties. I reviewed parcels for delivery in Oregon that were mailed from other states. While reviewing parcels, I noticed U.S. Priority Mail Express parcel EE268067624US (hereinafter "Subject Parcel 1") and saw that the parcel was addressed from "G. Gorton, XXXX Ahab Rd., S. Yarmouth, MA 02664" and to "Brian Newcomb, XXXX NE 7th St., Bend, OR 97701." The parcel weighed 3 pounds, 13 ounces, the scheduled date of delivery was November **Declaration of David Hardin EXHIBIT A PAGE 5**

16, 2018 before 3:00 PM, and the mailer paid \$56.80 in cash to purchase the postage. I noticed the mailing label was handwritten and it appeared it was addressed from a private individual to another private individual.

- 14. The "Signature Required" service on USPS Priority Mail Express parcels requires the parcel be received by an individual who must sign for the parcel and provide their name. I know from my training and experience that drug traffickers who mail controlled substances, and the drug purchasers who send payment in the form of cash or other drugs, normally do not request the Signature Required service to avoid law enforcement identifying the true recipient of parcels. In this way, drug traffickers can distance themselves from the package containing controlled substances or from the proceeds of the sale of the controlled substances in the event the package is intercepted by law enforcement. I observed the Signature Required box on the label of Subject Parcel 1 was not checked by the mailer.
- 15. I know people use Priority Mail Express services for parcels containing items they consider valuable, important or requiring rapid delivery and will often include their phone number on the mailing label spaces provided so the postal service may contact them in the event a parcel is mis-shipped, damaged, or the delivery address is illegible. I noticed the Subject Parcel 1 did not display telephone numbers for the sender or recipient. Based on my training and experience, I know drug traffickers often choose not to include phone numbers, or put incorrect phone numbers on parcels, as they are often aware that phone numbers can be traceable to their own names or physical location.
- 16. I conducted open source and law enforcement searches and determined the sender, "G. Gorton," does not associate with the sender address. Additionally, the address listed for the sender is fictitious. The recipient, "Brian Newcomb," associates with the recipient address.

- 17. I reviewed USPS business records and located two (2) Priority Mail Express parcels sent from the Subject Parcel 1 sender city to the Subject Parcel 1 recipient address since October 2018. The parcels were mailed from South Yarmouth, MA to Bend, OR on October 15, 2018 and November 14, 2018, respectively.
- 18. Continuing on November 15, 2018, I reviewed USPS business records and identified U.S. Priority Mail Express parcel EM027609271US (hereinafter "Subject Parcel 2") in the mail stream destined for delivery to the Subject Parcel 1 recipient address. I observed Subject Parcel 2 was mailed approximately 30 minutes after Subject Parcel 1 from different post offices that are 4 miles apart from one another.
- 19. I know from my training and experience that drug traffickers who mail controlled substances, and the drug purchasers who send payment in the form of cash or other drugs, sometimes send multiple small parcels, in close succession, from different post offices, instead of sending one larger parcel. In this way, drug traffickers can minimize losses suffered if law enforcement officials intercept parcels containing controlled substances, the proceeds of the sale of the controlled substances, or facilitation funds.
- 20. On November 16, 2018, Portland Police Bureau High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Interdiction Team Officer S. Groshong, a Certified Controlled Substance Dog Handler, and his certified controlled substance detection dog, Rex, responded to the USPIS Portland Domicile located at 7007 NE Cornfoot Rd., Portland, OR 97218. I prepared a "line" of parcels of similar size and appearance to Subject Parcel 1. H.I.T. Officer Groshong and his certified controlled substance detection dog Rex "proofed" the line and the area surrounding the line. Proofing a line of parcels is the process by which a controlled substance dog handler deploys a controlled substance detection dog on a line of control parcels to confirm that none of the control parcels are

emitting the odor of controlled substance the controlled substance detection dog is trained to detect. Officer Groshong stated Rex did not alert to the presence of the odor of controlled substance on the parcels in the line or the area surrounding the line at that time. Officer Groshong and Rex left the immediate area and I put Subject Parcel 1 in the line in a position unknown to Officer Groshong and Rex. Officer Groshong returned to the line and deployed Rex on the line of parcels. Officer Groshong told me Rex alerted, in the manner he is trained, to the presence of the odor of controlled substance on Subject Parcel 1. Rex did not alert to any of the other parcels in the line. Continuing on November 16, 2016, at approximately 10:00 PST, I contacted USPS employees in Bend, OR regarding Subject Parcel 2. They told me the sender and recipient addresses on Subject Parcel 2 were the same as the sender and recipient addresses on Subject Parcel 1. I requested the USPS Bend employees send Subject Parcel 2 to me for further investigation.

- 21. Continuing on November 16, 2018, at 09:47 PST and 10:56 PST, I scanned Subject Parcels 1 and 2, respectively, as "Seized by Law Enforcement" in the USPS Product Tracking and Reporting (PTR) system. PTR is the system that allows customers to check and/or receive updates to the progress of parcels as they travel through the USPS delivery system. The "Seized by Law Enforcement" entry tells the customer to contact the USPIS to make inquiries about the status of seized parcels.
- 22. Continuing on November 16, 2018, Brian Newcomb contacted the USPIS inquiring about the status of the seized parcels, Subject Parcels 1 and 2. Mr. Newcomb left a message requesting a Postal Inspector return his call regarding the parcels.
- 23. On November 17, 2018, Postal Inspector Adam Sale received Subject Parcel 2 at the USPIS Portland Domicile. Subject Parcel 2 was addressed from "G. Gorton, XXXX Ahab Rd., S. Yarmouth, MA 02664" and to "Brian Newcomb, XXXX NE 7th St., Bend, OR 97701."

The parcel weighed 4 pounds, 5 ounces, the scheduled date of delivery was November 16, 2018 before 3:00 PM, and the mailer paid \$56.80 in cash to purchase the postage. I noticed the mailing label was handwritten and it appeared it was addressed from a private individual to another private individual.

- 24. The area provided for the sender and receiver telephone numbers on Subject Parcel 2 were blank and the Signature Required box was not checked.
- 25. Continuing on November 17, 2018, Officer Groshong and his certified controlled substance detection dog, Rex, responded to the USPIS Portland Domicile. Inspector Sale placed Subject Parcel 2 in the USPIS Portland Domicile Administrative Office area previously searched by Officer Groshong and Rex. Officer Groshong and Rex were not present when Subject Parcel 2 was placed in the USPIS Portland Domicile Administrative Office area. Rex was directed by Officer Groshong to examine the USPIS Portland Domicile Administrative Office area. Officer Groshong told Inspector Sale that Rex alerted on Subject Parcel 2 in the manner that he was trained to alert when he detects the odor of a controlled substance, and did not alert on any other objects or locations in the USPIS Portland Domicile Administrative Office area.
- On November 19, 2018, members of the USPIS Portland Domicile contacted Brian Newcomb at telephone number 515-XXX-7458. Newcomb stated he was expecting music equipment from an acquaintance in the Cape Cod region of Massachusetts. Newcomb further stated he did not have knowledge of what the parcels contained and declined a consent request by the USPIS to open the parcels. In addition, Newcomb stated he did not compensate the sender for the parcels at this time and also stated he has not previously received any parcels from the same sender. Newcomb stated he was just beginning a music equipment business relationship with the sender and would discuss compensation at a later date.

- 27. On November 20, 2018, members of the USPIS Portland Domicile again contacted Brian Newcomb at telephone number 515-XXX-7458. Newcomb provided telephone number 508-XXX-5634 for the sender of Subject Parcels 1 and 2, Garrett Gorton. Newcomb reiterated that he expected the parcels to contain music equipment and nothing else.
- 28. A review of law enforcement databases reveals the telephone number provided by Newcomb for Garrett Gorton, 508-XXX-5634, connects back to Gary Gorton, 23 Centerboard Ln., South Yarmouth, MA 02664. In addition, USPS business records reveal the address, 23 Centerboard Ln., South Yarmouth, MA, has received five Priority Mail parcels sent from Bend, Oregon since September 2018. All five of the parcels delivered to the 23 Centerboard Ln address weighed from 12 to 15 pounds, indicative of the mailings of controlled substances from Oregon to non-marijuana source states. A social media search of Garrett Gorton in the South Yarmouth, Massachusetts area revealed numerous images of marijuana, marijuana paraphernalia, and Butane Hash Oil (BHO). BHO or cannabis oil is an oleoresin obtained by the extraction of cannabis or hashish. It is a concentrated form of the plant containing many of its resins and terpenes in particular, tetrahydrocannabinol, cannabidiol, and other cannabinoids. It is often called honey oil due to its resemblance to the sweet viscous substance. BHO extraction is more often used for purer, clearer forms of marijuana concentrate such as glass and shatter.
- 29. Continuing on November 20, 2018, members of the USPIS Portland Domicile contacted Garrett Gorton via telephone 508-XXX-5634. Gorton stated the two parcels sent to Brian Newcomb in Bend, Oregon contained electronics and did not contain prohibited mailing items, including currency. Gorton denied a request by the USPIS to open the parcels via consent. Additionally, Gorton stated this was the first time he conducted business with Newcomb in Oregon. Gorton denied ever receiving any parcels from Bend, Oregon and further denied ever

receiving any parcels weighing 12 to 15 pounds. Members of the USPIS Portland Domicile asked Gorton if he was a user of controlled substances. Gorton stated he was not a user of controlled substances. Investigators asked why pictures posted on Gorton's social media account included marijuana. Gorton agitatedly stated the images were old and ended the telephone call. A review of Gorton's social media account following the telephone conversation revealed the account was no longer accessible to the public and was now listed as "private."

- 30. Continuing on November 20, 2018, members of the USPIS Portland Domicile again contacted Brian Newcomb via telephone. Newcomb denied receiving parcels from Gorton on previous occasions or sending out any parcels to Gorton. Newcomb stated he did not expect anything other than electronic equipment in the subject parcels, and stated that he did not expect the parcels to contain currency and/or controlled substances.
- 31. On November 21, 2018, The Honorable John V. Acosta, for the United States District Court for the District of Oregon, signed a search warrant to permit the inspection of Subject Parcels 1 and 2. On November 28, 2018, in the presence of Postal Inspector Adam Sale, I opened Subject Parcel 1. Subject Parcel 1 contained \$13,240.00 in U.S. currency (49 x \$100, 12 x \$50, 372 x \$20, 19 x \$10, 20 x \$5, 10 x \$1) concealed within a Sony DVD Player box. The currency was wrapped in carbon paper and had been placed inside the DVD player itself. Continuing on November 21, 2018, in the presence of Postal Inspector Adam Sale, I opened Subject Parcel 2. Subject Parcel 2 contained \$15,000.00 in U.S. currency (30 x \$100, 47 x \$50, 473 x \$20, 16 x \$10, 5 x \$5, 5 x \$1) concealed within a Sony DVD Player box. The currency was wrapped in carbon paper and had been placed inside the DVD player itself.

CONCLUSION

32. Based on the foregoing information, I have probable cause to believe, and do

believe, that the \$28,240 in U.S. currency seized from U.S. Priority Mail Express parcels

EE268067624US and EM027609271US are subject to forfeiture pursuant to 21 U.S.C. §881(a)(6),

as moneys furnished or intended to be furnished by any person in exchange for a controlled

substance, proceeds traceable to such an exchange, or moneys used or intended to be used to

facilitate violations of 21 U.S.C § 801, et. seq.

I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct pursuant to

28 U.S.C. §1746.

Executed this 29th day of April 2019.

s/ David Hardin

David Hardin

Postal Inspector

United States Postal Inspection Service

SJS 44 (Rev. 12/07)

CIVIL COVER SHEET

The JS 44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replace nor supplement the filing and service of pleadings or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form, approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating

I. (a) PLAINTIFFS	DEFENDA	DEFENDANTS					
(b) County of Residence (E. (c) Attorney's (Firm Name	NOTE:	County of Residence of First Listed Defendant (IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES ONLY) NOTE: IN LAND CONDEMNATION CASES, USE THE LOCATION OF THE LAND INVOLVED. Attorneys (If Known)					
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□ 1 Original □ 2 Re	ate Court	Appellate Court	4 Reinstated or	Transferred from another district (specify)	Litigation		
VI. CAUSE OF ACTION			e filing (Do not cite juri	saictional statutes	unless diversity):		
VII. REQUESTED IN COMPLAINT: CHECK IF THIS IS A CLASS ACTION UNDER F.R.C.P. 23			DEMAND \$	DEMAND \$ CHECK YES only if demanded in complaint: JURY DEMAND:			
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